MN June 8, 1977 White-Beaven, Martin

Art — brain watches as the hands create

By ALEXIS SHIELDS

If you are congenitally creative, your muscles work ahead of your brain.

When this happens, a person's muscles are doing more thinking than the brain and you have a situation where the brain actually stands aside and watches the operation of the hands as they create, says Mississauga artist Martin White-Beaven.

"I think this is the only way to explain creativity," he said, relaxing in the lower summer room of his Port Credit area home. In the background is the chirping of a group of birds taking afternoon baths in the bird bath thoughtfully put out by his wife, Kathe. This afternoon the area around the bird feeder station is quiet, the local residents having taken their lunch an hour previously.

With the afternoon sun blending into quick cloudiness in the small plant-filled room, he talked about creativity and how he blends creativity into his daily life.

Only the techniques of art can be learned, he said. Creativity itself is not something that can be taught or learned.

Displaying one painting of a mask placed to rest on an ordinary table chair with a skull protruding from the corner of the painting, he pointed out how the skull had "forced itself into the work.

"I found that as I worked on the mask and chair the skull developed by itself," he said. "This happens quite a lot."

He talked about a second example of this phenomenon where he started painting two girls coming out of a building. Before he finished the work there were 30 figures on the canvas.

"As I worked more and different figures gradually developed themselves," he said. "Something happens in the movement of the ideas from subconscious to conscious and the brain takes this over and refines it."

White-Beaven finds great joy in his innate creativeness; this mood comes especially, for example, following a heavy rain and seeing pieces of paper and other objects soaked with precipitation.

"I see a piece of paper hit by the rain and see the beautiful sculpture created whereas many others just see a piece of wet paper," he said.

"I see creativeness all around me."

He takes his natural creativity to make use of all forms of scrap materials. His skill and artistic eye can be seen in an old-fashioned lamp, standing on a six-foot post, made from copper and zinc, and a pop can with the sides of the lamp made by pressing frosted paper between two thin pieces of glass to create a frosted look.The parts were riveted and soft soldered together. It's nice to realize what scrap metals can be made into, he commented.

Born in London, England in 1908, White-Beaven received his education at the Ealing School of Art and the Bolt Court School of Photoengraving and Graphic Arts, both in London. After emigrating to Canada in 1948, he became a Canadian citizen in 1955.

He employed his school training in commercial and graphic art at De Vita Studios immediately upon coming to this country, staying there for three years.

"I still recall landing in Toronto on a Saturday and having an interview at the company the following Monday," he said. "The interviewer asked me when I would be able to start work and I told them I would find a place to stay the next day and be ready for work on the Wednesday. They just laughed.

"I left the interview, picked up a Toronto Telegram and found a two-line advertisement for a room with breakfast, called them and rented the room. I was lucky — it was only two bus transfers from my place of work.

"I certainly surprised my employers when I arrived, as I had said I would, for work on the Wednesday morning," he added.

"The work there was good for me because I was busy immediately and the fellows accepted me readily, a fact that I appreciated," he said.

An innovator from the beginning, he created, along with a third year architectural student and an artist, a scale model of Victory Mills and some adjoining parts of the Toronto waterfront which included the buildings of Canadian Breweries.

"I remember that we couldn't mention the word beer at that time," he said. "How times have changed."

He used materials that had not been used previously in this kind of modelling, he said. Where others had used sponges for the trees and cardboard for the buildings, he used three millimetre plywood for the buildings and branches with thick combed felt for the trees which were then sprayed with lacquer. It was a first for scale modelling here, he said.

Turning his mind to display cases, White-Beaven created and designed a display case that could be dismantled and transported anywhere for a fraction of the cost of building and transporting a display case built as one piece.

He designed these cases for General Electric and Addison Radio, as well as a display case on a much smaller scale for ladies' Wadsworth compact pens made by Parker Pens.

He considers this work as part of what he did to earn his Canadian citizenship.

He recalled with a laugh an incident when he was doing some lettering on a door for a Yonge St. jeweller on a Sunday afternoon.

"I had already done one window when I felt a figure behind me," he said. "I turned and saw a policeman. He politely asked me if I was going to be long at my lettering, quietly pointing out that I wasn't supposed to be working on a Sunday.

"The policeman was really very decent about it," he laughed, adding that he hadn't realized that people were not supposed to work in Toronto on a Sunday. "I suppose he had watched me for a while, walking around for a bit and only came over when I was almost finished."

Although the couple first lived in Toronto upon arriving in Canada, one bright day they were driving up Centre Rd., off the Lakeshore, when his wife said "this is it for me" and he set about buying the property and having their house built.

"We have been here for the last 25 years," he said, "and we don't see any reason to move."

Retired for the last six months, White-Beaven hasn't slowed down for he sees work as a necessity and plans

to keep busy working at home.

"I have so much to do," he said with a smile, "that there hasn't been time to consider the fact of retirement."

One of the things that will continue to occupy his time is his work on what he terms quantum art. He used this term because it indicates a desired number. These works are composed of a theme of form repeated to fill a particular area.

"A unit demands a certain amount of space," he said, "and I follow the form where it goes."

His art comprised of pieces of metal are called montage by art galleries. One piece consists of metal figurations of a man, woman and two children.

"I wanted to term it a contemporary landscape reformed," he said, "but the art galleries didn't like this term. They said it was too lengthy."

Another piece he calls The Tin Man is made up of pieces of metal run over many times by cars, complete with a face and a pendant around his neck.

White-Beaven has also struck into the world of jewelry with pendants made of two pieces of very thin steel foil fused together and dabbed with paint. There is a special design on each of them (one side) and a hook for a chain. He calls it street jewelry.

There will be an exhibition of his works at the Valhalla Inn, Highway 427 at Burnhamthorpe Rd., just off the main lobby, from June 6 until July 5. The exhibition is open to the public.

Although he finds Toronto one of the most exciting cities in the world, he is wholeheartedly a Mississauga resident.

He accepts the expansion in Mississauga, but rejects the term "dormitory city" that some people have attached to the city. He would like to see the term killed and buried because "the city is a viable area on its own."

And so White-Beavens and his wife will continue enjoying Mississauga, constantly creating and finding enjoyment in the objects around them . . .